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ABSTRACT

This research report documents teachers' views on why and to what extent they use textbooks. How the environment influences the use of textbooks can be determined when their use in schools is studied. The following three major research questions were addressed: (1) how do teachers use textbooks, guides, and supplementary materials available through publishers? (2) why do teachers rely on textbooks to the extent they do for planning and for instruction? and (3) what are the apparent influences of the textbook and its use on the curriculum? The research took place in one school for part of a year, with 10 teachers participating. Research procedures included observing and taking notes in the 10 classrooms for 6-10 days each, discussing practices with teachers and the principal, collecting photocopies of pages from text-related materials the teachers were using when observed, and discussing work assignments with students. Findings showed that 9 out of 10 teachers used texts, textbook guides, and accompanying materials extensively and with few changes and viewed the curriculum as a series of pages to cover. Students viewed the work as a series of things to complete. Peer pressure and ease of use caused teachers to rely heavily on the use of textbooks. (Author/NE)

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# Textbook Use in a Central Ohio Elementary School

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## Background

For several years now, I have been quite concerned about the relationship between textbooks and the curriculum. Most of our literature in the field seems to discuss curriculum development as if textbooks didn't exist, yet they appear to have a profound influence upon what teachers do and thereby upon what students have an opportunity to learn in schools.

As I studied teacher planning in 1978 (McCutcheon, 1981), I found that most plans were related in one way or another to the textbook. For many teachers, ideas for content were derived solely from the text, and materials most frequently used in lessons were the textbook, workbook, the teacher's guide ideas for boardwork, and accompanying dittoes and tests. I remembered that while I taught for 8½ years, most teachers around me seemed to use textbooks for most lessons. Over fifty years ago, in 1931, Bagley wrote that teachers were dependent on the text for most of the day. More recent research seems to bear this out as well. A study done by the Educational Products Information Exchange in 1978 reports that most of what students do in classrooms is textbook-related. Frymier, Davis and Clinefelter in 1977 found that 78% of curriculum materials used in classrooms are print based, and that approximately 98% of the messages received by classroom students came directly from printed instructional materials rather than from teachers. The National Science Foundation studies by Stake, Easley, et.al. (1978) also support this impression about the extensive use of textbooks; they found in

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general that textbooks were being used rather than the "new" curricula in science and social studies. It looks as if we may have a national curriculum; it's called textbooks.

This welter of literature raises several questions. For one, over 150 companies compete for school district's money, but recently seven firms have been earning 57% of the revenue (Bowler, 1978). Many such companies are owned by conglomerates such as IBM, Xerox, Bell & Howell, CBS, The New York Times, Litton and ITT. Two states - Florida and Texas - because of their single statewide adoptions seem to influence what is contained in some of those texts (See Black, 1967; Bowler, 1978). We might wonder in what respects the profit motive of such conglomerates and the values of two states' adoption boards should influence what is taught in schools nationwide. Is there an inherent conflict between the profit motive and developing educationally sound materials? And between the ideal of a pluralistic nation and conservative forces influencing the textbook industry and thereby the curriculum of our nation? If the research about the extent of textbook use is true, should such companies and the values of two states control the curriculum? Secondly, we know little about the nature of use of such materials. We have statistics pointing to an extensive use of texts, and some indication that this has been the case for at least fifty years, but we know little about the nature, character, and qualities of teachers' and students' uses of textbooks. Further, speculations about reasons for such widespread use are rampant, but little has been done to document teachers' views regarding why they use textbooks to whatever extent they do or to explore other avenues in this regard. In 1980, I proposed to study this matter in three schools, with 18 teachers over a three-year period. Studying textbook use in three schools would permit an examination of how the context influences textbook use.

Policies or a social climate (including peer pressure) in one school might not be a factor elsewhere, so I believed it was crucial to work in several schools. I wanted to study the matter for three years to discern how extended use of a particular text affected use. It seemed likely that use of a textbook was quite different the third year as opposed to its first year of use because the teacher's previous experiences with the text would provide a basis for many decisions; in the first year, the lack of those experiences and less understanding of the total program would undoubtedly influence decisionmaking and thereby decisions.

The proposal was rejected by NIE because it was not perceived to deal with an important issue. In 1981, funding by Spencer Foundation permitted study in one school for part of a school year. (What's that they say about the best-laid plans of mice and men?) The funding released me part time for one quarter, employed a graduate student, Fred Burton, supported travel to the schools and a modest honorarium for the teachers involved in the study. It would not pay for the teachers to be released for one day to meet to discuss the reserach, but the teachers applied to the local teacher's center for release time to do this.

A principal who had critiqued the NIE proposal wanted her staff to be involved in it. She had already outlined the project to her faculty, and one wintry morning I visited the school and discussed the project with the faculty and asked them to "sleep on" their decision, that I would return the next day. Five already knew they wanted to be involved in the study, and the next day six others signed up. One later dropped out because she had a student teacher placed in her classroom late in the quarter; we agreed that subjecting a student teacher to a research project might rattle her. Three

of the teachers had been reluctant to join the venture because of their bad experiences with a research project the preceding year.

The study could be described as collaborative in that the principal had critiqued the proposal, teachers and outsider-researchers worked together to gather information, speculate, raise questions and offer interpretations. It could be described as phenomenological in that insiders' perspectives were sought. It could be described as ethnographic in that the relationship between the school culture and textbook use was studied. And it could be described as qualitative in that the primary focus was upon the qualities -- the character, nature or essence of textbook use.

## Phases of the Research

Conceiving of the problem.

Obviously, the first phase of any research project is conceiving of the research problem and ways of studying it. This took about three years, reading previous research, observing classrooms for other reasons but thinking about textbooks as well, and discussing it with teachers and administrators. They critiqued early drafts of the NIE proposal, posed additional questions, and pointed out features of practice that I might not have considered but that are important to the study. They reminded me of what was feasible to study. The following questions are illustrative of questions addressed through this research project:

1. How do teachers use textbooks, guides and supplementary materials available through publishers ?

    a. What parts of texts, guides and supplementary materials do teachers use and delete? What do they emphasize in texts, and what do they cover in less depth? What reasons do teachers give for these decisions?

    b. In what ways do teachers use the texts? Which parts do they deal with through lecture, throught recitation, through having children read aloud and through other activities? How do they restructure activities to provide for homework and seatwork?

What reasons do teachers give for these decisions? How is the nature of the content changed or adhered to when activities are altered? In what ways do teachers change the intent of authors of texts?

c. Do teachers follow the order presented in the textbook? If they restructure the order, why do they report they do this? If not, why do they follow the guide's sequence?

d. What options do teachers perceive they have? In what ways do they supplement the text? What are the sources of ideas for these supplementary activities? What materials available through the publisher are used? Why are these used? What other materials or activities do teachers provide? What do teachers report to be the reasons for these decisions?

e. Do teachers use texts in the same way with different instructional groups? Why or why not? How does this use affect what they have access to and thereby are able to learn? Does it appear to relate at all to the socio-economic or sex makeup of the groups?

f. Do teachers use texts differently according to different subject areas? If so, in what ways, and what seems to account for the differences?

g. How do differences in use (e. and f.) relate to teachers' views of how children learn, view of their roles and views of the nature of the subject matter?

2. Why do teachers rely on texts to the extent they do for planning and for instruction?

a. What edicts, mandates or suggestions do administrators transmit to teachers that lead to the perception that they are to rely on text materials?

1. How does the school budget (e.g., for text materials, ditto paper, supplementary materials and consumable materials) influence textbook ordering and use?

2. Does the time allocated to various subjects influence textbook use? How? Who decides upon the schedule?

3. What other administrative mandates and practices influence textbook use? In what ways is it influenced?

b. What textbook adoption policies and procedures are used by the state department of education and in what ways do these contribute to teachers' reliance on texts?

c. What textbook adoption policies and procedures are used by the school system?

1. Have teachers involved in the study served on adoption committees, and if so does this affect their reliance on texts?

2. In what other ways do these policies and procedures affect teachers' reliance on texts?

d. What psychological value do teachers see in reliance on texts (e.g., the need for certainty about what to teach)?

e. What intellectual factors seem to support its uses (e.g., the teacher's lack of knowledge about a particular subject matter or ways of teaching it, the ease of use)?

f. What factors within the context appear to support the use of texts (e.g., customary practice, social pressure from peers)?

g. What other factors appear to influence the use of texts?

3. What are the apparent influences of the textbook and its use on the curriculum (i.e., on what children have an opportunity to learn)?

a. What is the nature of the curriculum emerging from the use of text materials?

b. In what ways do parts of the curriculum conflict or support one another due to the text materials? (For example, certain text materials are based upon a particular role for the teacher, implying certain views of how children learn. If another material based on different assumptions were used in the same classroom, would conflicts emerge, or do teachers sift out those conflicts and present a unified approach to both subjects?)

Collecting evidence.

Several research procedures were used; a variety was needed because of the wide range of questions to be addressed. These procedures included:

observing in the 10 classrooms for 6-10 days each and maintaining fieldnotes
discussing practice with teachers and the principal
keeping a transcript of a meeting that included all 10 teachers
observing sales pitches from textbook representatives and maintaining fieldnotes
collecting examples of work students were to do
discussing with students what they were doing
collecting xeroxes of pages from text-related materials the teachers were using when observed
soliciting notes from teachers about matters they thought important and in response to our questions
collecting memoranda and policies thought to affect textbook use

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A chart of the questions and relevant procedures follows:

| Research Questions | Research Procedures |
|---|---|
| 1. How do teachers use published materials? | |
| a. What parts do they use? | Comparing observations and plans to teachers' guides and texts |
| Why do they delete or use various parts? | Discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| b. In what ways do teachers use them? | Observing, analyzing plans |
| What reasons do they give? | Discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| c. In what order do teachers use materials? | Comparing observations and plans to teachers' guides |
| What reasons do teachers give? | Soliciting journal entries, discussing |
| d. How do teachers supplement the texts? | Observing, analyzing plan books, discussing |
| What are sources of ideas for supplementary activities? | Observing, soliciting journal entries, discussing |
| What reasons do teachers have for providing the activities? | Discussing, soliciting journal entries, observing |
| e. Do teachers use texts the same way with different groups? | Comparing observations made of one group to those made of another |
| How does this affect what children can learn? | Analyzing observations |
| f. Do teachers use texts differently for different subjects? In what ways? | Comparing observations among subject matter areas, analyzing plans |
| What accounts for differences? | Discussing soliciting journal entries |
| g. How do teachers change textbook use from year to year? Why do (or do they not) change? | Comparing observations made one year to those made later<br>Discussions, soliciting journal entries |
| h. How do alterations relate to teachers' views of learning and the subject matter? | Observing, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| 2. Why do teachers rely on textbooks? | |
| a. What mandates influence the reliance? | Collecting memos, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| b. What State policies about adoption influence it? | Collecting memos, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| c. What local adoption policies influence it? | Collecting memos, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| d. What psychological factors have a bearing? | Observing, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| e. What intellectual factors have a bearing? | Observing, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| f. What contextual factors influence teachers' reliance on textbooks? | Collecting memos, observing, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| g. What other factors appear to influence their use? | Collecting memos, observing, discussing, soliciting journal entries |
| 3. What are apparent influences of the textbook on the curriculum? | |
| a. What is implied about the nature of the subject matter? | Analyzing observations |
| b. How do parts of the curriculum support one another or conflict? | Analyzing observations |

Teachers and the principal were involved in several enterprises. The principal interviewed the superintendent, and collected system-wide, county-wide and state-wide policies and memos that might affect textbook use. Teachers also collected memos, reflected, reacted to our statements and queries, and volunteered information, reflections and reactions. For example, at an all-day meeting, several wondered "Whose idea is it that we have to adopt new books every five years? Why five years, and why the same amount of time for each subject matter?" Others wondered why the language arts had been separated into four areas. Teachers volunteered for the study, received an honorarium, and a day away from teaching to discuss the research. During the summer, two read textbook research, and one interviewed a local publishing company texbook editor about his practice. The principal and I are searching for ways to get the project funded so it can be expanded.

Reflection.

Before we began to observe, I reflected upon what to study and appropriate ways of studying various matters related to textbook use. At times, I tried out ideas on unwary colleagues or on groups of teachers and principals. What themes associated with textbook use seemed important? How might we gather evidence about them? And while we observed, and afterwards, we reflected about what we saw and heard, collected and discussed. What did it all mean? This activity continues from a project's beginning, past its being reported. While driving to or from the school, sitting in the teacher's lounge or principal's office, various people involved in the project would reflect upon or discuss what we were understanding about the nature of textbook use, reasons for that use and its affect upon the curriculum. Private reflection allowed us to make meaning for ourselves; reflecting in public

allowed us to begin constructing interpretations aloud in a safe environment. This is an expecially important phase for us now, as we develop themes and sift through the 9" of materials to find and index evidence supporting or/ refuting interpretations.

Findings

The themes of the study and the supporting evidence aren't particularly surprising. More than anything else, perhaps, they provide empirical support for several commonsense notions about practice. These themes, around which several papers are being developed are:

1. In this school nine of ten teachers used textbook guides and accompanying materials extensively with few, infrequent changes. Among those changes were:
   a. reordering questions;
   b. providing local examples related to material in the text;
   c. omitting material deemed redundant or too difficult;
   d. omitting activities that called for manipulations, groupwork, divergent thinking, a lot of movement or materials not readily available.
2. In nine of ten classrooms material was usually taught by:
   a. lecture/recitation;
   b. reading aloud and answering related questions;
   c. extensive practice in workbooks and dittoes.
3. In these classrooms, work was viewed by students as a series of things to complete (not as exercises from which to learn).
4. Nine of ten teachers seemed to view the curriculum as a series of pages to cover.
5. Various factors seem to account for this widespread, extensive use of texts:

a. beliefs that because the School Board ordered the texts, they must be used;

b. peer pressure

c. parent pressure for homework and bringing books home every weekend;

d. the state - required, locally - written courses of study;

e. beliefs about what school should be like;

f. ease of use, clear organization;

g. responsibility to plan and teach seven to eight subjects, sometimes with 3 ability groups, yet rich understanding of fewer subjects and little planning time;

h. former principals who had high school experience and had difficulty giving advice about effective teaching of elementary school students;

i. a lack of many other materials;

j. beliefs about the need for uniformity and continuity;

k. previous education courses which did not help teachers critique materials, develop curricula or units, or make materials.

6. The curriculum in this school was organized by subjects; text materials play a major role in supporting this. Most of the curriculum materials were two-dimensional, calling for passivity, convergent-thinking, characterized by filling in the blanks (written and orally) Supplementary materials, when used, were usually of the same type.

As Harriet Talmadge (1972) alleges, it appears in this school that the textbook is the arbiter of the curriculum. But, how typical is this pattern? I believe it is all too common in our schools, but I'd like to do more research to verify or cast aside that impression. Work to get funding will continue, and several articles are on the way detailing this research.

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